

Strength in industries that draw on creative content. This asset is closely connected to the one above, but rather than start with market access and seek to exploit it, this asset is about looking at a given region's core industries and seeing which ones can develop increased competitive advantage from the infusion of creative content. Clearly Forsyth County/Winston-Salem's design industry depends on creative content, but the other two sites under examination draw on it as well. In Beaufort County, the hospitality industry seeks to expand and intensify its competitiveness not only through its natural amenities and activities related to these amenities, but also by incorporating unique aesthetic elements into its offerings – such as gallery visits, historical site tours, and theatrical performances. And in Ashe County, local stakeholders are working on incorporating the region's traditional wood carving and other artisan traditions into its rapidly growing and lucrative second home industry.

Connections with local historical traditions and heritage. For this asset, the word "connections" is the key. Many places have a rich history that seems as though it should be contributing in some way to the local economy – yet because no specific initiative has been put in place to express and build upon this history, it has little impact on the economy. In addition, without some kind of present-day communication about and engagement in a place's historical traditions, they soon lose their reality for the younger generations – and also lose their potential for economic impact. All three of the sites investigated by the study team are engaged in active initiatives to keep their history alive and build on it for economic impact. For Beaufort County, the most significant initiatives involve ties between the historic downtowns in Washington and Bath and the hospitality and tourism industries. These serve to root these industries more solidly to Beaufort County as a place than would be the case if the area were offering only sea and sand – while these are considerable amenities, they are on offer in many places. Incorporating Beaufort's history into its tourism industry allows that industry to offer something that is unique to Beaufort.

In Forsyth County, connections to the Moravian community and its aesthetic traditions are infused not only into its tourism industry, but are being innovatively parleyed into new sources of ideas for the region's manufacturers. Firms in the furniture and textile industries are working with Old Salem to identify patterns and designs common in Moravian furniture and fabrics, and incorporate these into their contemporary offerings. The resulting products are then offered both as part of the manufacturers' product lines and are sold in Old Salem stores. (It is worth noting that this inventive practice is being effectively used by firms in industries that are, for the most part, in decline in North Carolina – except in those high-end niche firms that are continually seeking out new and distinctive sources of aesthetic and design input – particularly sources that are integrally connected to the place in which they originate.)